

K-Pop Fandom and Beauty Trends: Investigating the Engagement of Young Urban Indian Women with BTS

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The Korean wave (Hallyu) has emerged as a global phenomenon spreading to many countries including India since the nineties. In the initial phase, Korean dramas attracted international attention, after which Korean pop music took the world by storm. With the rising popularity of K-pop in India (Jiju, 2023), it is essential to understand the influence it carries on Indian fans. This paper delves into understanding how K-Pop has influenced ideas about beauty among young adults in Vadodara, a cosmopolitan town located in the western Indian state of Gujarat. Three focus group discussions were carried out with fifteen youngsters who identified as K-pop fans, particularly of BTS (Bangtan Boys), a South Korean boy band formed in 2013. The research design adopted for this study was qualitative and exploratory. Theoretical underpinnings informed by *The Social Construction of Reality* (Berger & Luckman, 1966) and *The Juggernaut of Modernity* (Giddens, 1990) were used to examine the influence of K-Pop consumption on ideas about beauty in the context of fandom culture. The findings reveal no significant influence on beauty-related values and ideals. However, K-pop does have a positive bearing on other aspects of the lives of its fans such as challenging stereotypes, promoting self-love, addressing social problems, and positive impact on individual personality. In addition, a shift in fashion ideals is observed indicating a growing trend of Korean-inspired fashion trends.

Keywords: Beauty, BTS, culture, fandom, Hallyu, K-Pop, pop culture, South Korea

Introduction

In the era of cultural globalization, the Korean wave has emerged as a global phenomenon. The Korean wave or Hallyu, is a term coined by a Chinese journalist to describe the wave of Korean pop culture leading to heightened visibility of Korean culture in East Asia and many other parts of the world (Jung, 2015). This process started in the late 1990s when Korean television dramas (K-dramas) became popular in China and other neighboring countries, dubbed as the first Korean wave (Hallyu or Hanryu in Korean) (Shim, 2006). Following the regional success of K-dramas, the second and more recent Korean wave (Hallyu 2.0) is associated with the global export of Korean popular music culture i.e., K-pop (Seo, Cruz, & Fifita, 2020).

Korean popular music, also known as ‘K-pop’, is a style of South Korean popular music characterized by catchy assorted melodies, intricately choreographed dances, flashy music videos, and most importantly, the artists, commonly referred to as “idols” (Romano, 2018). The Korean Wave is dubbed as South Korea’s greatest export (Mahr, 2012). This can be seen through the wide acceptance of cultural products that have been exported by Korean entertainment companies in the form of dramas, music, and fashion (JoongHo Ahn, 2013). The export of Korean content witnessed a steady increase since 2005, but between the years 2015 and 2020, it has more than doubled, going from \$5.6 billion to \$11.92 billion (Johnson, 2023).

Indians became familiar with the Korean wave in 2012 when a humorous pop song 'Gangnam Style' from a South Korean singer and rapper named PSY hit the mainstream media (Sarkar, 2023). Thousands of versions and parodies of this global hit song

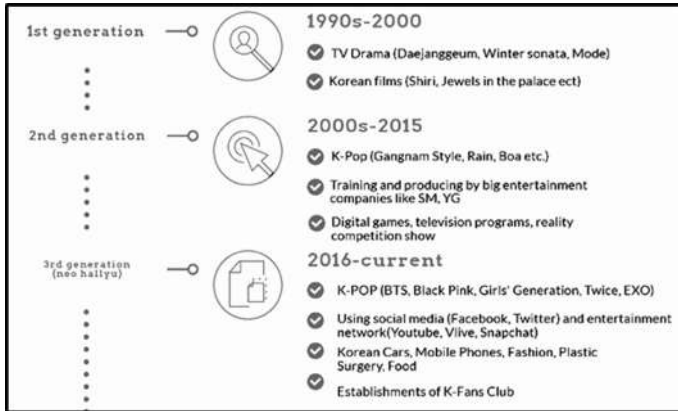
were created. In recent times, one of the prominent reasons for the spread of the Hallyu wave across India is the immense popularity of BTS, (Nag, 2023) a South Korean band with seven male musicians, managed by Big Hit Since June 2013. The abbreviation stands for ‘Bangtan Sonyeondan’ or ‘Bulletproof Boy Scouts’ and the group has seven members—three rappers and four vocalists (Lee & Nguyen, 2020). BTS debuted in 2013 and, although their success was not immediate, they have become the world’s biggest boy band, breaking down doors in Western markets for other K-pop artists to follow (Johnson, 2023). Four-time nominees and winners of the Top Social Artist award at the Billboard Music Awards, BTS were the first Asian artists with a non-English album to chart at number one on the Billboard 200 (McLaren & Jin, 2020). They also created history by becoming the only Asian act to win Artist of the Year at the American Music Awards and the first K-pop group to ever receive a nomination at the Grammys (Jayaratne, 2023). BTS’ fandom known as ‘ARMY’ (Adorable Representative M.C. for Youth), is known to be the most diverse fan base in terms of race, sex, gender, ethnicity, age, and religious beliefs (Chung, 2022).

Estimated to be in the millions, one of the most notable achievements of the BTS ARMY was when on June 6, 2020, BTS, donated \$1 million to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) campaign, after which ARMIes quickly followed and matched the million-dollar donation in less than twenty-four hours under the hashtag #MatchAMillion on Twitter (Kim & Hutt, 2021). In fact, ARMYs through the One-In-An-ARMY (OIAA) initiative¹, have organized

1 OIAA (<https://www.oneinarmy.org/>) is “a fan collective comprised of volunteers across the globe” that believes in using their “collective power for global good”. The motto “I am ONE in an ARMY” suggests that “many people giving small amounts can create a substantial impact”.

and engaged in campaigns that address a range of human rights issues, including refugee crisis, LGBTQ, disability, and educational rights in the name of BTS. Therefore, the BTS fanbase is a significant factor in the band’s success as evidenced by their social media presence and other internet activities (Chang, 2019).

Fig 1: Hallayu timeline



(Image source: Uyuna, Zakaria, & Rahim, 2020)

Related Literature

A study titled "Malaysians’ Acceptance Towards Korean Beauty Standards Embedded in Korean Popular Culture", by Farah Alia Zaizakrani, (2021) provides an understanding regarding the media-generated behavior of a population exposed to Korean beauty standards and how they respond to them. The study employs a qualitative approach that includes content analysis based on library research. A total of sixty sources such as journals, theses, books, reviews, and conference papers within the recent ten-year time frame were examined and analysed. The study is carried out in the Malaysian context because Malaysians consume Korean pop culture in a big way and hence may be influenced by such mediated content. The author finds that Malaysians' acceptance of Korean

beauty standards is generally positive owing to celebrity obsession and idolization. They are changing their behaviors and attitudes due to Korean celebrity idolization. They try to imitate the makeup, hairstyle, and outfits of their favorite idols. They however reject beauty standards pertaining to cosmetic surgery due to religious obligations.

Another study titled "The Effects of South Korean Beauty Standards on Body Image, Self-Esteem, and Life Satisfaction Amongst Asian Americans", by Janessa Akemi Fong (2021), analyses the influence beauty standards have on body image, self-esteem, and life satisfaction with a focus on the perspectives of Asian Americans. Using a questionnaire, 178 Asian Americans were asked to complete several self-report measures relating to body image, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. The results demonstrated that the correlations between the key variables of the study i.e., western male beauty standards, South Korean male beauty standards, western female beauty standards, and South Korean female beauty standards were high but there was no statistical significance.

In their study titled "Role of Pop Culture in Popularizing Gender-bending Fashion and Ideals of Beauty and Makeup" Jaanvi Jairath and Rhea Daima (2021) explore the impact that pop culture and social media have had in introducing themes of beauty, makeup, and gender-bending fashion. In the context of the influence of media in pop culture, through movies, songs, TV series, YouTube videos, social media content, and celebrities, the authors used content analysis to study the influence of fashion, beauty, and makeup on common viewers. They conclude that due to the increased reach of social media platforms, people have begun to question what they previously believed about traditional gender roles and gender identity, resulting in an increasing number of people discovering and displaying their gender identities through beauty, makeup, and fashion.

Concepts of beauty, makeup, and gender-neutral fashion are gaining popularity and greater acceptability in society with the exponential growth of social media platforms. Abie Besman et al. (2018) in "The Change of Beauty Standard: A Korean Wave Phenomenon: Findings from Bandung City" identify changing beauty standards following the invasion of the Korean Wave in Bandung, Indonesia. A set of questionnaires was developed to collect respondent beauty values from 311 participants using an analytical descriptive approach. No significant change was found in beauty-related values among the respondents. The reason for this is the pervading influence of Western culture long before the Korean wave. Therefore, media exposure cannot always affect cultural values. In a study about the K-pop industry's influence on masculinity. In "Transition of the idea of masculinity in K-pop culture within Indian viewers" Teresa Devi Arambam (2019) examines how the idea of a 'new male' has emerged through digitalization. Using 'BTS' as an icon of the new K-pop trend, the researcher found out that there are men who acknowledge their feminine side. The paper elaborated on the concept of soft masculinity. The findings indicate that the influence of K-pop has led to better acceptance of gender fluidity among Indian viewers. Social media and digitalization have led to a transformation in traditionally held notions about masculinity. The growing K-pop fanbase in India has led to the acceptance of the 'new male' and a shift in perspectives about gender roles and expectations.

Research on Korean beauty standards also focuses on analysing and understanding how consumer zeal for Korean skincare routines and products has emerged. Yoo Jin Kwon (2018) in his work "The Emergence of K-beauty: Rituals and Myths of Korean Skin Care Practice", using a theoretical framework on consumption ritual concludes through a content analysis of web pages focusing on Korean skin care that three types of content dominate the web – 1)

articles on K-beauty written by various writers, 2) beauty blog posts, product reviews and skin care tutorials, and 3) retailer's shopping site. This conclusion is drawn after an analysis of sixty-one articles from thirty-one websites. In her thesis titled "The Impact of K-Pop on Social Media Among Malaysians Youth: A Study on the Influence of K-Pop Idols on the Beauty Standards, Fashion Trends and Lifestyle Habits of the Malaysian Youth in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor", Andrea Hue (2023) states how some studies highlight K-Pop's promotion of beauty diversity and self-confidence, however, they overlook challenges related to body image and appearance anxiety among fans.

Similarly, research on K-Pop's financial aspects exposes vanity-driven spending and scalper culture but fails to examine their interconnectedness and potential consequences. She emphasizes the need to look at the potential negative effects of K-pop culture and the influence of idols on young people's behavior. Her research offers useful advice on how the detrimental effects of K-pop fandom can be mitigated by involving a variety of stakeholders such as youth, parents, educators and schools, media professionals, and the government. The study employs a qualitative research approach by conducting in-depth interviews with five dedicated K-pop fans with a minimum of five years of active engagement with K-pop.

In "K-Beauty Effect on Health Behavior and Korean Cosmetics Purchasing in Indonesia" (2023) Rachmawati Widyaningrum, Khairunisa Ramadhani, and Budi Lestari demonstrate that some adolescents who worshiped Korean idols had a negative body image and did a strict diet, heavy exercise, took weight loss pills or did plastic surgery to meet their body goals. The study was conducted by reviewing relevant research articles between 2012 to 2022 on the topic through a Google Scholar search engine. Fourteen articles that met the inclusion criteria were reviewed. The researchers conclude that the emerging K-beauty trend

should be balanced with the knowledge about a healthy way to gain beauty and the understanding of halal cosmetics in the context of Indonesia. Yuri Seo, Angela Gracia B Cruz, and Ilaisaane ME Fifita's Research titled "Cultural Globalization and Young Korean Women's Acculturative Labor: K-beauty as Hegemonic Hybridity" (2020) points to manufactured naturalness, hyper-sexualized cuteness, and the 'harmonious kaleidoscope' as paradoxical characteristics of K-beauty. They study how young Korean women respond to the changing ideals of K-beauty, embodied by Korean pop celebrities when such ideals become exported as global cultural products.

Present Study: Rationale and Significance

Though K-pop has a fanbase all over India, their presence wasn't much noticed. In recent times, K-pop fever has multiplied due to India's growing internet population. Social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook, and OTT giants like Netflix and Amazon have made possible increased exposure to K-pop content for Indian audiences (Kanozia & Ganghariya, 2021). Therefore, it is critical to understand the wide-reaching effects of K-pop vis-à-vis Indian consumers. This study delves deep into understanding how K-pop has influenced ideas about beauty among young adults in Vadodara, a cosmopolitan town located in the western Indian state of Gujarat. BTS was chosen as the focus of the study since it is considered to be one of the most popular symbols of K-pop's rise in the globe. Through focus group discussions, we explored how BTS influences ideas about beauty among young K-pop fans in Vadodara. As a developing country, India's exposure to Korean content is a new phenomenon that is already expanding its wings into Indian society.

According to Reimeingam (2014), the effects of Korean culture through the propagation of different Korean cultural products are felt differently across societies and countries and the response of audiences to the Korean wave also varies from culture to culture.

Hence, from a societal standpoint, it is important to investigate the dissemination of another country's culture into our society. It is vital to comprehend how the culture of another country influences our society, culture, economy, and polity especially since India has a booming young populace. In the context of the influence of foreign cultures on India, the phenomenon of cultural imperialism should be studied as Indians increasingly consume cultural products from around the world. This study is significant in terms of contributing to the academic discourse emerging from India on K-pop fandom culture and its larger impact on India's socio-cultural landscape.

Conceptual Framework

In *The Social Construction of Reality* (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in argued that society is created by humans and human interaction, which they call habituation. They say that we construct the social world and our understanding of it through words, actions, and media products. Social construction of reality addresses the processes by which people jointly construct their understanding of the world. In this study, social construction helps acknowledge how standards and values around beauty differ from culture to culture. Beauty standards are influenced by a society's morals, values, and beliefs. A beauty standard is established when a group of people make it a reality. Therefore, there is no specific definition of beauty standards, as the concept of beauty itself cannot be standardized/defined. Thus, the social construction of reality helps understand Korean beauty standards developed collectively by Korean society, in which K-pop plays a significant role. K-pop emphasizes Caucasian features and standardizes beautiful to mean-fair, dewy, glass-like complexion, double eyelids, a high nose bridge, and red or pink tinted lips – beauty goals shared by most women in South Korea (Stone, 2013; Wang, 2024).

In *Juggernaut of Modernity* (Giddens, 1991), Anthony Giddens described the modern world as a juggernaut, an advanced stage of modernity. Like a powerful machine, modernity, if not controlled meaningfully, can be highly harmful to society. The juggernaut crushes those who resist it and while it sometimes seems to have a steady path, there are times when it veers away erratically in directions we cannot foresee. In the context of K-pop and beauty standards, the juggernaut framework helps to understand the influence that pop culture exerts. In his theory of structuration, Giddens (1991) argues that individuals and societies are mutually constituted, meaning that they are constantly interacting and influencing each other. This is relevant to understanding how the influence of K-pop works. Lastly, in his book, *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990), Giddens uses the example of a juggernaut to explain the immense power of globalization and technological advancement as forces so strong that they seem invincible and can affect our lives significantly, whether we like it or not. In this study, K-pop represents this juggernaut which some ignore and oppose, while some others embrace and adopt. Here, we explore what kind of choices do fans make to join or resist the K-pop juggernaut, particularly for the beauty standards they adhere to.

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study was exploratory and descriptive to acquire an in-depth understanding of the subject. Since K-pop and its influence on Indian masses remains a contemporary topic and individuals today are still grappling with it, an exploratory approach is best suited to understand if K-pop is influential with respect to beauty trends and ideas among young women and in what ways is this influence seen among them. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was employed as the primary method of data collection. It is a qualitative research method designed to obtain a multitude of diverse views on

a topic, yielding a collective rather than an individual view (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Three FGDs with fifteen young adults were carried out in Vadodara city. The choice of the FGD method was natural since the researchers' aim was to elicit conversations around themes of K-pop fandom, BTS, beauty ideas, and societal impact. The FGD method allowed room for discussion to take place where participants contributed to a broader, deeper, and holistic understanding of the subject under study. Through FGDs, a discourse around what young women think of K-pop culture and beauty emerged facilitating the researchers in understanding their worldviews using an Emic approach (The Emic approach focuses investigation of a theme from the participant's viewpoint whereas Etic approach emphasizes the researcher's standpoint). An FGD guideline was developed to conduct the discussions and it was validated by an external expert who is a professor of sociology.

The FGD guideline comprised fifteen open-ended questions (Annexure 1) divided into two parts. The first set of questions focused on a general understanding of the interface between K-pop and BTS (nature of fandom, introduction to BTS, time spent, reasons for admiration, etc). The second set comprised questions specific to fashion, beauty, makeup, style, body shape, and skin complexion in reference to K-pop and BTS. Non-probability purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to recruit participants in the FGDs before which informed consent was sought from them. The study comprised of fifteen young adults aged 18-24 years because this age group consumes South Korean cultural content in a big way (Statista, 2023). Owing to constraints of resources and time and the research being primarily carried out as a student project, the sample size was decided on the basis of proximity, accessibility, and availability of participants who identify as K-pop fans and who have been consuming K-pop content for at least three years. The sample size was kept limited owing to the deep, rich, and extensive textual data that is derived using

the FGD method which involves extended conversations on a topic with a group of people. The purposive sampling technique helped identify young women who considered themselves as K-pop fans and snowball sampling facilitated reaching out to a wider and more diverse group of respondents through already recruited participants. The data collected was primary, textual, and descriptive in nature. To assist in the subsequent analysis of data, audio recordings were made and transcripts were prepared. Codes and categories were generated through inductive coding, suited for exploratory research. Emergent codes and categories helped identify repetitive patterns in the data set which resulted in theme-based explanations using thematic analysis.

Table 1: Sample details

Sr. No.	No. of Participants	Mode of FGD	Age group (in years)
FGD 1	5 (M=0, F=5)	In-person	19-22
FGD 2	5 (M=0, F=5)	Online	18-24
FGD 3	5 (M=1, F=4)	In-person	18-24

Study Limitations

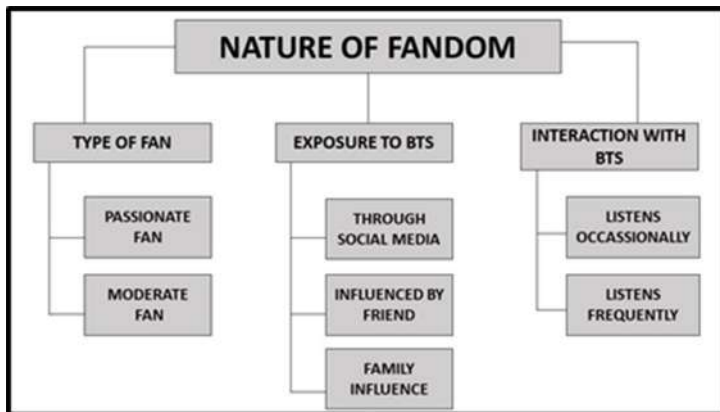
- The sample size in this study was small and it was confined to a single location owing to limitations of resources and accessibility to participants.
- Data was collected using a single method i.e., Focus Group Discussion. Hence insights drawn could not be compared and corroborated with the use of other methods.
- The study was executed in a limited time frame. Therefore, it focused only on K-pop, specifically on BTS. Other forms of Korean pop culture like dramas, movies, entertainment TV programs, and games could not be studied.
- Majority respondents who participated in the study were female. Male consumers of K-pop were difficult to find despite several consistent attempts.

Key Findings

This section summarizes the major themes derived from the Focus Group Discussions. Since the number of female participants was more compared to male respondents, we conclude that women are more regular and active K-pop consumers than men. In terms of region and age group, all the participants were equally distributed.

Theme 1: Nature of fandom and admiration for BTS

Fig 3: Nature of fandom

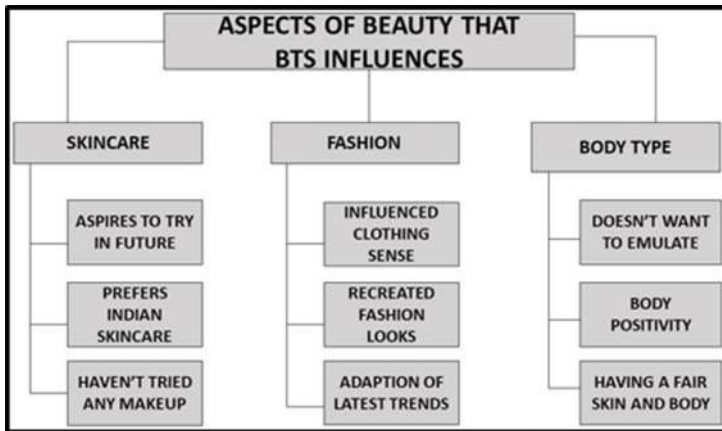


Findings indicate that respondents follow BTS passionately and are drawn to their music, dance, fashion, physical appearance, style, friendship, and chemistry. They also cherish the sense of belonging and community that being a BTS fan brings. One of the respondents shared, “According to me, this fandom is like a family. That’s why I love staying with all the armies”. Friends, family, and word-of-mouth information about BTS has played a vital part in introducing them to the group. Another major influence comes from social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp. When asked why they like BTS, participants mentioned ‘personal characteristics’, ‘dedication towards work’, and ‘genuineness’ reflected in BTS as primary reasons. One of them said, “I have

this idea of 'hum saath saath hai (all together)' for them and I love them because they behave like real people; they don't pretend to be someone else.” Another added, “... their dedication, their hard work, and most importantly, how genuine they are. I guess no other artists are like them”.

Theme 2: How BTS influences ideas about beauty

Fig 4: BTS and ideas about beauty



Under this theme, participants expressed opinions about the influence BTS carries on various aspects related to beauty such as skin care, fashion, and body type. They said they prefer Indian skincare products and have not used any makeup practices inspired by BTS, at the same time, they aspire to try BTS beauty routines in the future. The majority of them expressed interest in trying Korean skincare and beauty techniques, but could not due to perceived time and cost constraints. Two of them said, “I’m very interested in it, but I have not tried it because they have a ten-step skincare routine which consumes a lot of your time” ... “I haven’t tried it but once I am financially independent then I would definitely try it”. Participants also demonstrated a preference for Indian skincare

over Korean beauty techniques because of their familiarity with Indian skincare products and it being more suitable for their skin type and the environment they inhabit (“If given a choice between my grandmother’s beauty lessons and Korean beauty products, I would choose my grandmother’s”, “When it comes to skincare, Desi (Indian) skincare is my thing”). Thus, despite challenges of time and money and preference towards indigenous beauty ethos, Korean beauty standards are appealing owing to how BTS members carry a shimmering, natural look (“I wish to try the beauty products they use once in my life”).

Respondents expressed admiration for BTS’ fashion style. They were highly influenced by how band members carry themselves in public. Some respondents shared that their fashion sense and styling changed after they started following BTS and they often tried to replicate BTS’ famous looks. They looked up to BTS members as style icons and were impressed by the street style and oversized clothes that they wore. Responses below capture the same.

“There is a member named Jungkook whose style is kind of street style so it resembles my personality a lot. I dress like him only. When it comes to fashion, I follow him. He is my style icon”.

“And Korean culture has influenced me into, you know, wearing oversized clothes, baggy clothes. I am very much into their fashion sense”.

“I guess my fashion sense is a lot influenced because of BTS. I followed them a lot in fashion, so my fashion sense changed drastically in the last few years.”

“I had styled my brother and I don't know if it was some winter packages, they were getting this cheetah printout, so I tried to recreate that look on my brother”.

When asked about body type, respondents expressed a desire to have a body and skin like BTS', but were not willing to follow a strict diet and workout routine. They acknowledged that Koreans follow a strict diet to maintain their body type, however starving

oneself to achieve a specific figure is unnecessary. Participants also emphasized ideas of ‘body positivity’ and ‘self-love’ and while BTS motivated some to stay healthy, others emphasized the importance of loving oneself no matter what (“Personally, I never felt that I should also have the body like theirs, because I have learned from their leader RM, that you are unique and beautiful in your own way. So, I love myself and it is also because of them”, “I started exercising in lockdown because I got very fat. So, after watching them I got motivated to do exercise and yoga. Yes, they’ve influenced me, but I never wish to be them”).

Theme 3: BTS’ influence on individuals and society

Fig 5: Influence of BTS on individuals

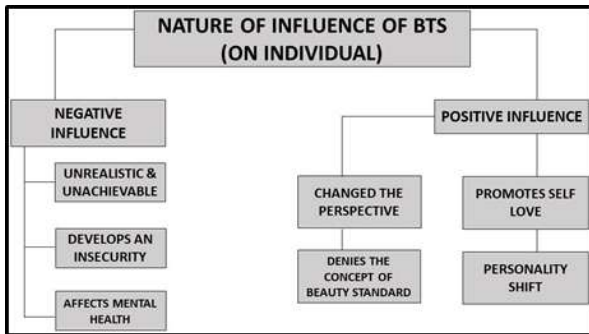
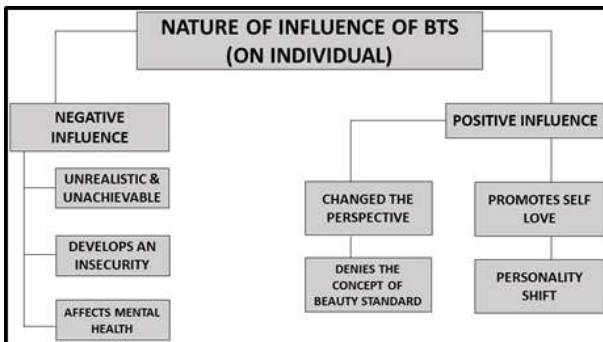


Fig 6: Influence of BTS on society



Examining the influence of Korean pop culture on fandom and society, it is found that the consequences can be both positive and negative. Beauty standards set by BTS are unachievable and unrealistic and many respondents expressed an unwillingness to invest time and money to fulfill it. One of them said, “Beauty standards in Korea are very different from the beauty standards of Indian culture. So, in an Indian context I think it’s unachievable”. Another added, “I think it’s not achievable because it is time consuming. You need an hour daily to do a 10-12 steps routine. So that is unrealistic”. Regular consumption of K-pop also infused insecurity about physical appearance, especially skin color among participants as a result of which they compared their own selves with BTS members, causing them to feel inadequate. This led to anxiety and low self-esteem, impacting their mental health. Sharing her experience, a respondent said, “So, when I got to know that they think fair skin is a sign of beauty... so, I used to not like my skin color. I developed insecurity about my skin color at that time and it affected me a lot”.

About positive influence on individuals, several respondents spoke about how BTS' message of "love yourself" had a significant impact on them. It encouraged them to love, appreciate, and accept their own selves. This shift in perspective extended not only to how they saw themselves but also to how they communicated with others. Instead of having a critical or judgmental perspective, they adopted a more optimistic and accepting attitude. Furthermore, they noticed prominent changes in their personalities, like becoming more self-confident, outgoing, and positive. The responses below reflect the same.

“I have started respecting people. If someone is fat or has dark skin, how to make them feel happy is what I have learned from BTS”.

“I will give credit to Jin as he made me love myself. Like I was very much under confident about myself about how I look or

what people will think ... But Jin taught me to be unique, not to listen to what others are saying and admiring what you are”.

“There is a change in my personality. I have become a little more open and accepting towards other people and my judgmental personality has lessened down”.

K-pop’s influence on society can be understood in both positive and negative ways. In the Indian context, beauty standards set by BTS are unachievable as they don’t reflect what is culturally acceptable in Indian society (“I feel it’s very difficult to achieve that level of beauty standards. Because as an Indian, we are brown people, our skin type is different so no matter how hard we try, it is impossible to achieve that fair skin”). Indian socio-cultural ethos is rigid and stereotypical in their own way, and hence Korean beauty values are incompatible with Indian society (“For Indian society if some guy is getting possessive about makeup and skincare then people will taunt him “ladki jaisa kyu kar raha hai” (why are you behaving like a girl. It will be very difficult for him”)). Moreover, many respondents expressed concern about young people who are obsessed with BTS and K-pop. They were worried that the pressure to look like them would make these youngsters unhappy and self-conscious. Due to this, their mental health may be affected, leading to depression, stress, anxiety, and insecurity. As affirmed by a respondent, “If you’re not able to achieve a glossy skin at the end, it will lead to depression and insecurity. They will not respect themselves and will become conscious all the time in front of people. So that is something that should not come into the society”.

On the positive side, some respondents stated that BTS has played an important role in challenging the stereotype of toxic masculinity through their distinct style and fashion choices. They questioned that men do not have to be strong, muscular, tall, or buff to be masculine. In doing so, they have contributed to a positive shift in how Indians perceive masculinity and while this change may

be slow and gradual, it is undeniably occurring. A respondent said, “So, I feel that BTS is reducing toxic masculinity across the globe. Because, you know some men can be overpowering. But BTS are trying to build a positive image by changing everyone’s perspective.” According to another respondent, “You would see on Instagram ... There have been a lot of men doing makeup. Even my own brother has started makeup. Earlier he would just wash his face but now he has a make-up kit”. Thus, BTS has also helped reshape market trends by normalizing practices such as men putting on make-up and following skin care procedures. This represents a larger shift in society as people are changing their attitudes toward men's self-expression and personal grooming.

Another positive impact of K-pop, particularly BTS, is its use of music and art to raise awareness of significant social issues. Fan communities applaud BTS for producing songs that address the challenges faced by young people today. Some respondents stated that their music is a source of support and comfort to them when dealing with mental health issues (“I really like their calming and soothing songs like Jimin's promise. So I used to play it before I sleep, so I could sleep without getting nightmares.”).

Discussion and Conclusion

This study about K-pop fan culture among young adults in a mid-sized urban town in western India reveals that the influence of pop culture on ideas of beauty can be evaluated from a social as well as commercial standpoint. In terms of societal values associated with beauty, K-pop’s influence on Indian cultural notions about beauty is limited. This is most likely because Indian society has its own firmly established beauty standards which are not easily affected by external cultural influence. However, K-pop does influence a variety of other aspects of their fans' lives positively. These include encouraging self-love, challenging toxic

stereotypes, addressing critical societal issues, and promoting a positive transformation in their fans' personalities. This shows that K-pop is a positive influence at times and K-pop stars are role models for their fans, even if they promote completely different beauty standards.

From the market aspect, it is noticeable that Korean culture has been accepted by Indian society through fashion, especially among the younger generation. Fashion trends have shifted to oversized clothing, streetwear, unisex fashion, and baggy clothing, all of which have gained considerable popularity in India. This Shift in fashion preferences indicates a growing trend toward Korean-inspired fashion patterns. This will most likely provide an impetus to the fashion market, with a greater number of customers exploring and accepting different designs, adding to the economic growth of the fashion industry. This development reflects India's adaptability to diverse cultures. It represents a change of mindset in which young people are breaking away from old-fashioned rules in favor of a more varied and international approach to personal style. This exhibits the power of cultural exchange in promoting economic progress and international cooperation.

It is clear that Korean culture, powered by the global phenomenon of BTS, may be compared to today's juggernaut of cultural change as discussed by Anthony Giddens in the concept 'juggernaut of modernity'. While some believe that K-pop will have a positive impact on the socio-cultural fabric, there are counter-views about the spread of Korean culture into other parts of the world, including India, though not just K-pop but other forms of Korean entertainment and its impact on indigenous cultures. The beauty standards found in the K-pop industry may not correlate with the diverse beauty values prevalent in Indian society but as the number of K-pop fans in India grows, there

is a chance that perceptions will alter significantly in the future. While the expansion of K-pop fandom in India provides exciting opportunities for cultural interaction and personal growth, and while cultural openness and diversity are key to a modern, progressive, peaceful future for the globe, it is also imperative to recognize the need to celebrate and preserve one's own cultural heritage and values.

Future Research

K-pop offers a wide expanse for research to be conducted in the future from a political, social, cultural, economic, anthropological and historical vantage point. Of specific interest is the economic impact of the Korean entertainment sector on Indian markets, enterprises, and cultural industry. Studies can be done to explore the influence of other K-pop groups and different forms of Korean entertainment media in the Indian landscape. Future studies can be carried out with a larger sample size and combination of a mixed method research design employing interviews, surveys, case studies, observation to derive useful and comprehensive insights about the current and future prospects of the Korean wave.

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